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Eranos, Esalen, and the Ecocentric Psyche: From Archetype to Zeitgeist

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Introduction

A singular Zeitgeist, spurning anthropocentrism in pursuit of a symbiotic relationship with nature, connects a succession of thinkers and movements from the Romantic revolution to the contemporary embrace of Eastern and neo-pagan spirituality, holistic health care, and environmental awareness. Shared in countercultural experiences of bohemians and hippies and agendas of feminists and environmentalists, this Zeitgeist ignited a tradition of authors who profess a similar solution to a culturally mandated crisis of perception that, lacking reverence for nature, leads to dysfunctional environmental relations. The purported solution unites the “balanced soul” envisioned by Romantic and Transcendental writers, the “*coincidentia oppositorum*” formulated by the depth psychologists at the Eranos proceedings in Ascona, Switzerland, the “connected self” advanced at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, and the “ecocentric psyche” imparted in the theory and practices emerging from ecopsychology. Each phase of this ecocentric tradition—which continues to be neglected academically because it smacks of New Age sensibilities—both reveals and determines ways in which the Western psyche is being re-identified with nature. The remarkably uniform message is clear and cogent: the West’s dysfunctional environmental relations rest in the culturally cherished beliefs that spirit transcends matter, that mind is separate

from and more significant than the body, and that we are lords and masters over nature; and to heal that dysfunctional split demands a reunion of the self and the sacred in nature, a re-balancing of ego and unconscious, masculine and feminine, and human and planetary.¹

The intellectual, moral, and aesthetic climate of a period of time, a *Zeitgeist*, presupposes a value-laden view of history. Although weighted with generalizations, obscured by exceptions, and elusive in nature, a “spirit of the times” conveys a mindfulness abiding in events, discoveries, and movements that triggers new ways of connecting and sharing individual and collective experience. Despite their intangibility, *Zeitgeists* help us to comprehend as well as see anew the world in which we live, to delineate historical periods such as “the Middle Ages” and movements such as “the Sixties,” and to discern and debate the collective psyche that underlies cultural change and values. Captured by a tradition of writers spanning from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, to Theodore Roszak and Charlene Spretnak, the *Zeitgeist* that I will sketch here bears witness to a growing ecocentric worldview and an understanding that the environmental crisis marks a culturally imbedded identity crisis confronting all levels of the psyche’s awareness. The tradition has assaulted prevailing Western thought’s eulogy of the masculine traits exhibited in its dominantly rational, hierarchical value system and its demonization of the feminine ecological impulse treasured in primal and Asian worldviews. By focusing the nearly two-hundred-year-old tradition and its message, and mapping briefly the cultural context surrounding its evolution, I will elucidate a “call of the wild” answered by a distinct “spirit of the times.”

The Romantic Search for the “Balanced Soul”

The term, “*Zeitgeist*,” was coined and codified by the Romantic philosopher Hegel, who claimed that an evolving “time-spirit” governs the flow of history through a dialectical process, or a clash of opposites that moves through a continuous cycle of “thesis,” “antithesis,” and “synthesis.” Hegel believed that the dialectic is guided by a “world mind” that would, through ample machinations, end in the ultimate *telos*, a point in history when that mind comes to know itself. The notion of the dialectic, freed from teleology, remained fundamental to Romantic sensibilities. Romantic artists and writers alike promoted intuition, spontaneity, ecstasy, individualism, and the sacred in nature in hopes of balancing the Enlightenment’s valorization of reason, order, control, industrialism, and cultural progress. From the veneration of

indigenous and Eastern traditions, the poetic call to re-connect with nature, the unleashing of nature and abstractionism in painting, to the sensual and nature-exalting music, Romanticism is defined by its “back-to-nature” ideology.

That ideology, articulated by a variety of writers, exposes and condemns the West’s perennial “war with nature” and advances the notion of a “balanced soul.” Those authors—such as Goethe, Emerson, William James, and Friedrich Nietzsche—maintained that Western culture has, in place of balance, established a system of separate and absolute opposites and incessantly valued one side at the expense of the other. By ignoring or suppressing intuition and mystical experience, ecstasy and animism, body wisdom and spontaneity, the West has nurtured a strictly Apollonian model of being human. The result, each of the aforementioned scholars contends, equals a fundamental mismanagement of human potential. The remedy rests in the renewal of reverence, inspired by the teachings and sensibilities of Earth wisdom traditions, for the sacred in nature. The relevance of the scholars’ convictions, testified by the fact that their work is readily available in bookstores, rests—I am convinced—in laying the groundwork for a psychologically based ecocentric outlook that is counteracting Western culture’s millennia-old anthropocentric worldview.

Goethe, the movement’s vanguard, mixed botany, cosmology, and theories regarding colour, evolution, and the “primal plant” with prose and poetry to describe “God-Nature,” “World-Soul,” and “Mother Nature” as the force that guides nature’s unending “metamorphoses.” His literary works, particularly *Faust*, helped incite the Romantic search for the “balanced soul,” a search that proved arduous for Goethe as well as Faust. Despite his celebration of the feminine in *Faust* (and elsewhere), Goethe’s depiction thereof is tainted by patriarchal myths and values: Faust finds the mere mention of “the Mothers” despicable; he is saved by a sky god; and the demonic side represented by Mephistopheles, much like Jekyll’s alter-ego, Hyde, and Frankenstein’s unfortunate monster, is left unrequited and stuck in the squalor of its own condemnable nature (a portrait analogous to Freud’s notion of the id). On the other hand, Faust’s salvation is linked to his “groping intuition” that keeps him on “the path that is true and fit,” and it is only after abandoning his faith in reason and a suicide attempt that he claims ecstatically that he is reborn in nature, belonging “once more to earth.” The two impulses that “cohabit his breast”—and, because of their enmity, torment him—are the “spiritual” realm of God, logos, light, reason, and control, and the “earthly” realm of Mephistopheles, “the Mothers of Being,” darkness, magic, and imagination. The witches’ love potion, the Mothers’ sabbat-like celebration, the night, and the trip to the Mothers’ “cosmic vault” represent the feminine impulse

that, along with his love for Gretchen, exonerates Faust—as the book’s last lines, spoken by the mystical chorus, indicate: “the eternal feminine draws us ever onward.”² Although he could not abdicate the patriarchal thinking that he attacked, Goethe helped initiate in modern culture a search for environmental dimensions of the psyche.

The rise of bohemian communalism endorsed that search by echoing the passion for imagination, individualism, and freedom. A protest of the conforming powers of industrialism and consumerism, Bohemia espoused informal fashion, drug use, naturalism, and wild and unpredictable forms of self-expression. Filled with charlatans and misguided rebels as well as visionaries, bohemian circles created intentional countercultural communities—not all of which were composed of the poor, struggling artist stereotypes. One of the late and most famous bohemian experiments flourished from the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth at Ascona, Switzerland—a place venerated by Herman Hesse and D. H. Lawrence. Located in the foothills of the Alps (near Monte Verita, or the “Mountain of Truth”), Ascona was home to Freemasonry and Theosophy, nudism and erotic psychotherapy, pacifism and vegetarianism, feminism and green politics, and revolutionary dance choreography and practices of the Mother Goddess worshipping *Naturmenschen*.³

The American “transcendental” experience also extolled nature and freedom and sought spiritual communalism. Groups such as Swedenborgians, Harmonists, Icarians, Unitarians, and Freemasons were part of the “Great Awakening” that accompanied the quest for the spiritual and political freedom that propelled the American Revolution. The writings of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Henry David Thoreau, and those of Margaret Fuller, Louisa May Alcott, and other early champions of feminism, the International New Thought Alliance, the Boston School of Psychotherapy and its Emmanuel Movement, the metaphysics of vedantists and theosophists, and the mental healing techniques of the New Thought groups are all testaments to the emerging Zeitgeist. Proclaiming the value of intuition, imagination, and the mystical missing in the worldview constructed by centuries of disinterested inquiry, by rising powers of industrialism, and by the pursuit of unidirectional progress, transcendentalists advocated feminist and environmental values as well as holistic health therapies and earth-centred spirituality.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a herald of the era, warned that the West’s sanctified masculine “ego” harboured an unbalanced way of thinking and being. He not only fought for women’s rights, the abolition of slavery, and animal rights, but also deplored the West’s failure to recognize mind and spirit in nature.⁴ Emerson cited Christian and scientific dogma as the main sources of the failure. By portraying Jesus as a “demigod,” an “Apollo,” the

Christian church fathers and “the following ages” emphasized the “biographical ego” as opposed to glorifying the “universal ego”; hence, the tradition has suppressed the mystical Kingdom within by exaggerating the person and not the message of Jesus. As such, it “corrupts all attempts to communicate religion” and, in the process, has created a “Monster” that “is not one with the blowing clover and falling rain.”⁵ The failure of science rests in its inability to recognize “the relation of the parts to the whole.” Sacrificing truth and unity of being for a classification of objects and “minuteness in details,” science without “metaphysics” is analytic description void of purpose and direction, which is why it lacks “sufficient humanity” and “overlooks that wonderful congruity which subsists between man and the world.” Under science’s spell, man’s “relation to nature” can be summarized as “his power over it.” Emerson believed that the collective failures of science and formalized Christianity have imposed an identity crisis: “The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself.”⁶ Drawing from Mother Goddess traditions, Eastern philosophy, and Dionysianism (under the names of Bacchus, Pan, and Orpheus), Emerson proffered a model of a unified, “balanced soul,” which, he insisted, is dictated by nature:

Each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as, spirit, matter; man, woman; odd, even; subjective, objective; in, out; upper, under; motion, rest; yea, nay . . . Whilst the world is thus dual, so is everyone of its parts. The entire system of things gets represented in every particle.⁷

To balance nature’s polarities one must identify the self as part of nature’s evolving mindfulness. Hence, “[T]he ancient precept, ‘Know Thyself,’ and the modern precept, ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim.”⁸ Or, as he pleaded in “The Over-soul”: “Let us learn the revelation of all nature and thought; that the Highest dwells within us, that the sources of nature are in our own minds.”⁹

The search for the balanced soul was shared by many other scholars of the period, such as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche. James called his model person a “healthy-minded individual.” Balancing the “tough minded” approaches of pessimists and logicians with the “tender minded” ones of optimists and theologians, James recognized “different levels” or “streams” of human consciousness as part of a more expansive cosmic consciousness. His notion of a “wider self,” which can be experienced through drugs, yoga, or other “requisite stimuli,” mirrors Romantic ideas and pursuits. Calling the “conversion” to a wider self the “keynote” of a healthy psyche, James linked Whitman and the new “religion of Nature,” “Emersonianism” and the “Mind-cure” movement, and “Christian liberalism” and a growing pantheistic worldview as examples of “healthy-mindedness.”¹⁰ Nietzsche based his notion of the balanced soul on Apollonian and Dionysian forces.

Certain that Western culture has eulogized the Apollonian principle of light, reason, control, and social convention and demonized the Dionysian principle of darkness, intoxication, mystery, and the divine in nature, he argued that the forces, when balanced, “constantly provoke each other to new and more powerful births.”¹¹ Prior to his obsession with Dionysus and the “will to power,” he insisted that the rational principle of individuation and the ecstatic urge for self-immersion in nature are necessarily harmonious—that is, Apollo and Dionysus “need each other.”¹² Despite the patriarchal dominance of their respective cultural milieus, Nietzsche’s writings, along with those of Goethe, Emerson, and James, helped initiate ecocentric psychology by recognizing the significance of the id before Freud even proposed it, by plotting the archetypes that Jung later helped formalize, and by seeking a psyche in harmony with nature.

The cultivation of ecocentric psychology would have to wait, however, predominantly because many of the modern projections of dialectical forces were drawn in strictly antagonistic terms. Beginning with Darwinian notions of evolution, the clash of opposites was viewed biologically as a constant conflict between predator and prey, strong and weak. While Marx secularized and modernized the clash in his dialectical materialism, which offered a critique of class structure from the perspective of “Scientific Socialism,” Freud did the same in terms of psychoanalysis. Freud not only assaulted the Romantic notion of the balanced soul, but also secularized Nietzsche’s Dionysian impulse in terms of the id, which he called the “Es” (or “It”). He considered humans to be products of a purposeless, uncaring cosmos and the id as the part of the psyche that is closest to the inanimate substance from which we haplessly emerge. The death instinct, Thanatos, equals a primal urge to return to the inanimate state and functions as a psychic form of entropy. The ego’s duty is to sublimate the id and activate the reality principle, which presumes an ego-sustained separation from nature that Freud insisted was necessary, for nature “destroys us—coldly, cruelly, relentlessly.”¹³ That modern view of nature, championed also by Darwin and Marx as part of the bio-sociological “survival of the fittest,” has been and is being revised by postmodern theorists as well as psychologists from old and new schools alike. An early alternative to modernism, Romanticism remains a source in the revising process.¹⁴

Eranos and the “Coincidence of Opposites”

Much as Romanticism challenged modern constructs and convictions, the second wave of the evolving ecocentric *Zeitgeist* countered the

debilitating effects of postmodernism's disconnecting, unrelenting pluralism. Furthering the Romantic attempt to marry mind and matter, spirit and nature, and East and West, many of the period's contributors—such as Carl Jung, Erich Neumann, Daisetz Suzuki, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell—converged at the Eranos proceedings beginning in 1933 in, befittingly, Ascona, Switzerland. Seeking ways to avoid the fragmentation and foreboding dissociation of the newly developing postmodern mind, the colleagues undertook, as Campbell testified, the “common task of understanding the present period of cultural catastrophe . . . and of prelude.”¹⁵ While the world wars contributed to that catastrophe, many other forces—from existentialism and theories of chaos and deconstruction to mass media and indiscriminate industrialism—were also strongly conducive. Signalling the destruction of the inherited modern worldview, postmodernism created an immense potential for cultural renewal, affording the opportunity and inspiration for colleagues at Eranos to frame the end of modernism. Utilizing what Campbell called “those ‘elementary forms,’ informing themes and visions, creative urges and symbolic aims—the ‘archetypes,’ in short—that have inspired, and are inspiring still, the cultural evolution of mankind,” the scholars sowed the seeds of a new epoch, one that goes beyond the deconstructive powers of postmodernism.

Foundational to the scholars' aim was the creation of a new language—based in symbols, archetypes, and the collective unconscious—designed to address the West's dissociated self. The language began with, as Campbell contended, the “folk psychology” of nineteenth-century writers, particularly J. J. Bachofen, whose delineation between Eastern matriarchal and Western patriarchal “myths and mindsets” profoundly influenced Jung and Neumann. Although they reprimanded Bachofen's promotion of the patriarchal as more spiritually advanced, Jung and Neumann drew from his distinctions to delineate between the feminine, intuitive, instinctive collective unconscious and the masculine, rational, controlled ego consciousness. Both avouched that the West has eulogized ego consciousness and oppressed the collective unconscious, and—along with their colleagues—turned to myths of heroic journeys, Mother Goddess archetypes, and teachings of Eastern philosophy as models of psychic balance.

The notion of a psychic journey, replete with obstacles and transformation, was introduced at Eranos with Jung's 1933 presentation, “A Study in the Process of Individuation.” Individuation, a journey toward “wholeness,” integrates the psyche's conscious and unconscious components. Jung recognized in the unconscious a vast repository of human perception as well as the creative forces that urge the

“Self” beyond the “persona” toward a balanced psyche. While Freud equated the libido with mere biological urges, Jung used it to supplant the notion of the id—which he considered a “funny name” and a convoluted concept.¹⁶ He likened the libido to flowing water because of its “natural penchant” to channel its energy and procure “progressive” transformation. When blocked, it leads to “regression”; when allowed to follow its natural course, the libido rhythmically enters consciousness through unconscious images and, having done so, returns to the unconscious for renewal. Individuation, the process of self-realization that balances psychic forces, leads toward a “*coincidentia oppositorum*” or an “integration of opposites,” such as shadow/light, anima/animus, and the Archetypal Feminine/Masculine. Under Jung’s guidance, Eranos participants adopted *coincidentia oppositorum* as their motto. As he related to Eliade at an Eranos conference:

Speaking always as a psychologist, I affirm that the presence of God is manifest, in the profound experience of the psyche, as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, and the whole history of religion, all the theologies, bear witness to the fact that the *coincidentia oppositorum* is one of the most common and most archaic formulas for expressing the reality of God.¹⁷

Eranos colleagues agreed that a healthy journey necessitates a renewal process, wherein the nature-defining impulses of eros, yin, and the libido are re-integrated with the culturally eulogized principles of logos, yang, and the ego. In his first presentation, Neumann outlined the evolution of consciousness through succeeding stages of mythological archetypes. In the first stage, the “source situation,” the ego exists as an embryonic awareness within the feminine unconscious, symbolized by the uroboros and the Cosmic Egg. The emergence of the ego through the hero’s victory over a fertility symbol of the Goddess (such as a dragon or serpent) signals the second stage, or the masculinization of consciousness. The third and final stage is represented by the hero’s marriage to the prisoner or anima (often a virgin in Western myths) freed from the phallic beast. Of the three directions of personality development that result from that victory, the first two, the extraverted and the introverted, have been crowned in the West as the warrior and the savior, athlete and artist, and political leader and inventor, respectively. The third or centroverted individual, whose victory occurs within the psyche, has as his or her primary goal or treasure the transformation of personality. The centroverted hero, only now reaching adulthood, is witnessed by the ego’s recognition of the whole self and willingness to submit part of its domain to the collective unconscious. Neumann declared that,

The civilization that is about to be born will be human civilization in a far higher sense than any has ever been before, as it will have overcome important social, national, and racial limitations . . . The turning of the mind from the conscious to the unconscious, the responsible rapprochement of the human consciousness with the powers of the collective psyche, that is the task of the future.¹⁸

In the process of defining the hero's journey, the colleagues offered a reconsideration of the nature-denying myths of Christ. Refuting the institutionalized, "parochial" Christ of orthodoxy, Campbell held that Jesus' death and rebirth represent the crucifixion and resurrection of the ego; and, as with all heroes, the resurrected psyche-Christ bestows the divine secret of the mysterious unconscious to humankind. The incarnation functions

as a mythological image transcending the popular notion of an absolute dichotomy of nature and spirit . . . in the person of Jesus not only was the idea of the absolute distinction of the opposed terms God and man refuted, but the point was also made that one should realize, like Jesus, this coincidence of opposites as the ultimate truth and substance of oneself.¹⁹

Eliade likewise indicted the institutional dogma associated with Christ's mythology as a symptom of Western culture's alienation from nature and her cyclical processes. He regarded specific hierophanies, or experiences of the sacred, that project the union of earth and sky, male and female, and biological rhythms as manifestations of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or the "archetypal model" of nature's sacred process of "eternal renewal." Because it centres on the rebirth of one individual, Christian myth transmutes the mystery of renewal into faith in a one-time event of linear history, which ends with the Second Coming or final judgment.

In this respect, Christianity incontestably proves to be the religion of "fallen man": and this to the extent to which modern man is irremediably identified with history and progress, and to which history and progress are a fall, both implying the final abandonment of the paradise of archetypes and repetition.²⁰

To remedy the West's abandonment of divine immanence and nature's sacredness, Erano's colleagues turned to myths, archetypes, and symbols of aboriginal and Eastern cultures. In his first presentation, Campbell contended that aboriginal and Eastern matrilineal, communal oriented planting societies lived by growing food and nurtured a mystical unity with earth gods and goddesses. The nomadic and Western patriarchal, hierarchical-oriented hunting societies lived by killing for food and regarded themselves in an ontologically separate state from their transcendent sky gods. Convinced that patriarchal societies were subjugated by hunting societies, Campbell avowed that Western myths have "masked" their Eastern aspects, making goddess figures not only subordinate, but also evil enemies:

In the older mother myths and rites the light and darker aspects of the mixed thing that is life had been honored equally and together, whereas in the later, male-oriented, patriarchal myths, all that is good and noble was attributed to the new, heroic master gods, leaving to the native nature powers the character only of darkness—to which, also, a negative moral judgment now was added.²¹

A goal at Eranos was to recover and re-activate the earthly, animistic powers expressed in Great Goddess traditions. In his 1953 presentation, “The Significance of the Earth Archetype for Modern Times,” Neumann concluded that human survival could well depend upon that revitalization.

Seeking a similar end, many colleagues implemented Taoist, Hindu, and Buddhist concepts to redefine the boundaries cast by ego consciousness and to re-identify the self with ultimate reality—be it Tao, Brahman, or “Buddha-nature.” Jung opened the first proceeding by submitting that only Eastern thought “has achieved completion: the West is a concatenation of inadequacies. My motto is to be found in Chapter 20 of the *Tao Te Ching*. There Lao-tsu wrote . . . ‘I cherish the Bestowing Mother’.” The Tao offers the most complete archetypal expression of nature’s bipolarity—as Jung pronounced often and clearly: “The ideal condition is named Tao, and it consists of the complete harmony between heaven and earth . . . The idea of the union of the two opposite principles, of male and female, is an archetypal image.”²² By eulogizing the yang and diminishing the yin, Western culture has, the colleagues professed, fostered a false dualism that honours the ego, soul, and reason as sacred and relegates the unconscious, nature, and instinct to the realm of the profane. Suzuki heeded dualism as a fall from paradise, from the “original oneness,” and in his first presentation, “The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism,” attacked the West’s obsessive use of rational, objective consciousness as a source of the human-nature separation. Because nature is regarded as foreign and hostile, as “something irrational but amenable to our mechanical, economical, utilitarian treatments; as something not human, not in possession of human feelings, and devoid of moral significance,” our original connection to our place in the cosmos is lost. Suzuki saw Zen’s “mind of no-mind,” “the unconscious conscious,” or “original enlightenment” as an avenue to reconnect with our sacred place “in order that Nature may become conscious of itself.”²³ Understandably, Suzuki’s attack of an over-developed ego as the source of the West’s alienation from nature merged seamlessly with the goals of the Jungians at Eranos.

While synthesizing aboriginal earth wisdom, Eastern thought, and Mother Earth archetypes to present potentially healing myths and to create prescriptions for the “unbalanced” Western psyche, Eranos challenged the concept of a male god who rewards and punishes his creatures and the mechanistic materialism of modern science, and

anticipated major points of attack in the 1960s revolution. As Eliade prophesied:

Sooner or later, our dialogue with the “others”—the representatives of traditional, Asiatic, and “primitive” cultures—must begin to take place not in today’s empirical and utilitarian language (which can approach only realities classifiable as social, economic, political, sanitary, etc.) but in a cultural language capable of expressing human realities and spiritual values.²⁴

Esalen, the Sixties, and the “Connected Self”

The articulation of that new cultural language accompanied the 1960s revolution, the most graphic and widespread embodiment of the ecocentric *Zeitgeist*. The language was formulated largely by and gained instant prominence through a number of humanistic and transpersonal theories and practices that were promoted at Esalen Institute. Established in 1962 by Michael Murphy and Richard Price at Big Sur, California, the institute and surrounding community are cultural equivalents of Eranos and Ascona, Switzerland. Murphy agrees:

Eranos and Esalen belong to the same universe of discourse, one which aims at healing the separation between East and West, religion and science, and body and soul. This constellation of people, ideas, and practices represents a dynamic coalescence of fundamental possibilities for human transformation and advance.²⁵

In many respects, Esalen anticipated the 1960s spiritual revolution. Murphy hesitatingly concurs:

We didn’t know what was going on and certainly couldn’t have predicted what was to follow, but like a lot of people, we sensed that a cultural Gestalt was just waiting to happen and that we could be part of it.²⁶

With its t’ai-chi sessions, rock concerts, radical political ideology, drug research, and free-love atmosphere, Esalen was a haven for hippies and, to its credit, served as the cutting-edge of the counterculture. Alongside the “easy-do” therapies that characterize the New Age, the institute was a major force behind the sixties’ dispersion of meditation, mysticism, and an array of holistic theories and therapies—including those of Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Rollo May, and Abraham Maslow.

The cultivation of the whole person or “connected self” has been a primary purpose of the institute, and much of the curricular consistency in pursuing that purpose owes to Murphy and his close friend George Leonard. Murphy believes that nature has endowed humans with psychic

and somatic abilities that transcend ego consciousness and point toward more profound evolutionary adventures, abilities that

would, if realized by enough people, create a new kind of life on this planet. This new life would involve new types of social interaction, new styles of energy consumption, greater care for the physical environment, more wisdom in dealing with human aggressiveness, new rituals of work and play.²⁷

Equally hopeful, Leonard coined the term “human potential movement” and credits Esalen for helping to expose “the myth of the separate ego” and to inspire the awareness that “consciousness has no skin.” In the throes of a so-called ego death, Western culture is processing an ecocentric vision that transcends not only racial and national boundaries, but biotic ones as well:

In a very real sense, there is only one species on this planet and its name is Life on Earth. Ecologists acknowledge this fact with their discussions of the biomass. We are beginning to realize that the extinction of what we now refer to as a species is some sort of amputation within the larger species of which we are a part.²⁸

Esalen has advanced ecocentrism through a matrix of sources, theories, and practices, beginning with those of Eastern traditions. Hundreds of seminar leaders have utilized yoga, meditation, and martial arts as well as Zen, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy. A disciple of Suzuki’s and friend of Murphy and Price, Alan Watts gave Esalen’s first seminar in 1962 and, along with Murphy (who spent over a year in an Aurobindo ashram in India), embedded Eastern thought in the aims of the institute. Watts summarized those aims as healing the psychosis of our age, “the separated self,” by reuniting the yang or overtly separate conscious mind which sees the world as the “non-self” with the yin or nature’s connected self so “the original sense of the seamless unity of nature is restored without the loss of individual consciousness.”²⁹ Drawing from concepts such as *maya* to describe the illusory or limited nature of ego consciousness, *dharma* and *wu-wei* to suggest ways to act in accordance with the balance or flow of nature, and *satori* and *moksha* to intimate transpersonal awareness, seminar leaders have infused Eastern thought to cultivate a wider, connected self.

The idea of a connected self is also a focus of the long-standing Esalen dialogue regarding the psychological ramifications of the new physics—a theme that Jung also advanced.³⁰ Citing quantum, chaos, and relativity theories, many seminar leaders—such as Watts, Fritjof Capra, and Gary Zukav—describe how the interconnected nature of reality emerging from the new physics resonates more discernibly with perspectives gleaned from Eastern mysticism than those related to the West’s mechanistic worldview. The further and deeper the macro-world

of astrophysics and micro-world of quantum physics is explored, the more cosmic connectedness is revealed. New-physics descriptions of uncertainty, probabilities, networks, patterns, and web-like interactions are replacing notions of absolutes, isolated particles, building blocks, and dualities such as matter and energy, wave and particle, and space and time. Moreover, because the role of the physicist changes necessarily the phenomena being observed, one can no longer speak of an objective spectator of a reality “out there.” Rather, those involved in “observing” become subjective participators within an inclusive process—one in which explanatory notions such as spontaneous creation and self-organizing capacities have become commonplace. As the eleven Esalen “New Physics” conferences that were convened between 1976 and 1988 attest, the institute has been a sounding board for many innovative perspectives, from “mind-in-nature” theories to those involving morphogenic fields and the holographic universe.³¹ The impact of such imagery and principles is clearly ecocentric.

Ecocentrism has been the aim of another group of Esalen colleagues that has focused on re-mythologizing Christianity and helped create a discipline called ecotheology. Again at the forefront, Watts submitted that the Christian split of sacred spirit and profane nature—the realms of God and the Devil, respectively—enforces the West’s goal to transcend the instincts of the body and to escape death. The split is psychologically explicable: because of an over-developed ego, Westerners have been conditioned to regard consciousness as good and the unconscious as evil. As the God of ecclesiastical imagery (“the ego of the universe”) is above and better than nature, the domain of the sinister, malicious Devil resides “downward in the heart of the earth, where all is dark, inward, and unconscious as distinct from the bright heavens above.”³² While Watts and others attempted to re-mythologize the Christian God, ecotheologians and seminar leaders such as Matthew Fox and David Steindl-Rast have cast a re-mythologized Jesus. Fox’s “Cosmic Christ” replaces the future kingdom in heaven with one realizable here and now. Proclaiming the universality of Jesus’ message, Fox retells the crucifixion story as the destruction of Mother Earth and the resurrection story as the rebirth of a living cosmology. Calling ecotheology a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, Steindl-Rast supports a Christ not of a particular religion but of a global community, not a judge who delivers rewards and punishments, but an archetypal symbol of human potential and communal healing.

While demonstrating that Jesus, Buddha, and a “thousand” other archetypes share the hero’s journey, Joseph Campbell, who helped make “myths to live by” a common Esalen theme, offered aboriginal and Eastern archetypes as guides for new myth making in the West

because they put humans on equal and speaking terms with all life forms. Even predator-prey relationships, in Native American and other aboriginal cosmic renewal myths, are mitigated as the self-sacrifice of one life form for another in a constant process of self-renewal. “We need myths,” Campbell claimed, “that will identify the individual not with his local group but with the planet.”³³ One such symbol for “the new mythology” might be derived from pictures of the earth floating in space, for such a view precludes boundaries of nations, states, and individuals and shows us that we belong here, “that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth.”³⁴ A frequent Esalen seminar co-leader with Campbell, Sam Keen views the 1960s as a new myth-making era that, in search of balance, encourages transformation:

Feminism, the ecological movement, the new physics, the antiwar movement, appropriate technology, humanistic psychology, are the tip of the iceberg of the new myth that grows stronger as the energy crisis and the arms race bring us to the consciousness that we are at an end of the old paradigm.³⁵

Holistic health, ecofeminism, and environmental psychology are clear signs of an emerging ecocentric paradigm and also confirm Esalen’s relevance. Besides an array of psychotherapies, the institute has fostered holistic health through workshops involving biofeedback, diet, exercise, spiritual healing, herbal medicine, acupuncture, homeopathy, and mind-body integration. The Women’s Studies Program, which started in 1973, led to the ongoing “Women’s/Men’s Issues” program, and, in the process, has opened Esalen to a variety of ecofeminist perspectives regarding feminine archetypes, healing, and individual and social transformation.³⁶ The “Wilderness Programs” have evolved from ecologically guided hikes to seminars, workshops, and conferences that incorporate a deep reverence for nature, while Ralph Metzner’s 1968 dialogues on “Ecology and Psychology” as well as Alan Watts’ and Lynn White’s 1971 “Ecological Crisis” conference confirm the early grounding of Esalen’s environmental agenda. As such, Esalen stands not only as a wellspring of the spirit of the Sixties, but as a critical enterprise in guiding that spirit.

Ecopsychology and Earth-Centred Sanity

Clearly, the Sixties revolution is over and the counterculture has been largely assimilated into the mainstream; however, the *Zeitgeist* that engaged the revolution and helps define the counterculture is very much alive in the New Age movement. Beyond the channelling, divining, astrology, crystals, tarot cards, and other New Age signifiers reside more

formative theories and practices—involving holistic health, Eastern and neo-pagan spirituality, and environmentalism—that grew out the human potential movement, which originally inspired the term, “New Age.” The success of the New Age has helped spawn a variety of antitheses, all of which are grounded in some form of conservatism. The resurgence of the spiritual and political conservatism in America is clear and adamant in its condemnation of New Age liberalism and spirituality. An additional, academic conservatism, found in clinical, behaviourist, cognitive, physiological, and humanistic psychology, has been very persistent in its distancing from not only New Age thought, but environmental issues and perspectives as well.³⁷ While some of this distancing is understandable in the face of New Age excess and extravagance, the lack of environmental awareness and concern on the part of proponents of the conservative paradigm in psychology is being recognized and rectified. Along with the success of the emerging fields of conservation and environmental psychology, a lucid force in the rectification process has been the rise of ecopsychology, which is conveying anew the ecocentric Zeitgeist at the turn of the millennium.³⁸

Shortly after the publication of Theodore Roszak’s *The Voice of the Earth* (1993), Michael Murphy invited him to organize a conference at Esalen to mark the arrival of ecopsychology. With help from Mary Gomes and Allen Kanner, Roszak convened an invitational conference in 1993 that aimed at delineating major principles of ecopsychology; and in 1994 they gathered twenty-seven participants who discussed issues and perspectives that remain fundamental to ecopsychology’s goals and functions. Ecopsychology fulfills what some psychologists regard as the inevitable evolution of psychology’s scope. Abraham Maslow—who helped establish “Third Force” psychology—recognized a need for “a still higher Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centred in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like.”³⁹ Roszak professes that ecopsychology offers such a perspective: “By defining mind and sanity in the context of a living planet, ecopsychologists are redefining human consciousness and health in terms of the wisdom of the id and the ecological unconscious.”⁴⁰

The id is, Roszak alleges, “the protohuman psychic core that our environment has spent millions of years moulding to fit the planetary environment.”⁴¹ Unlike Freud’s depiction of an infantile id that needs to be directed by the adult ego and the corresponding reality principle, the amended id (much like Jung’s libido concept and Maslow’s notion of “instinctoid”) possesses an innate wisdom that has always directed life. That id, with which “the ego must unite if we are to become a sane species capable of greater evolutionary adventures,” is no longer merely

the property of the collective unconscious, but now belongs to the ecological unconscious—or “a psyche the size of the Earth.”⁴² The sum of all life experience and evolutionary wisdom, the ecological unconscious posits the planet as mindful. Drawing from theories such as Gaia and biophilia, ecopsychologists heed Earth as a living, self-regulating ecosystem that not only harmonizes cosmic forces in life-friendly ways, but also blesses us with an innate love of nature that defines our need for communion with other species and the environment in general. Sanity, in such a context, requires awareness of life’s connectedness and an understanding that human action not tempered by reverence for life is insane.

Ecopsychologists have diagnosed urban industrial nations with a collusive madness that is manifest in symptoms such as crime, stress, cancer, depression, pollution, sexism, racism, specieism, and sex, drug, and food addictions. Along with bureaucratic dehumanization, progressive specialization, technophilic obsession, and pathological consumerism, the rise of epidemic afflictions point to a separation of consciousness from nature, to an alienation of the self “in here” from the environment “out there.” Ralph Metzner portrays the so-called “split self” in terms of autism, addiction, and collective amnesia. Metzner declares,

Like autistic children, who do not seem to hear, or see, or feel their mother’s presence, we have become blind to the psychic presence of the living planet and deaf to its voices and stories, sources that nourished our ancestors in preindustrial societies.⁴³

Ecocidal addiction owes in part to the inhumane agendas of transnational corporations and the advertisement industry that aim at making potential consumers feel inadequate without their products. The continued use of, for instance, cigarettes, toxic pesticides, plastic grocery bags, and aerosol cans are obvious signs of the widespread denial of an environmental crisis, which, in itself, is a symptom of an addiction to an unsustainable way of life. Finally, our collective amnesia represents a lost connection to, as Metzner avers, “something our ancestors once knew and practiced—certain attitudes and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with nonhuman life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world.”⁴⁴

Confident that we share the innate need to revere life’s common ancestry, ecopsychologists advance a host of therapies to heal our alienation from nature, drawing from many sources, such as the methods and rites of indigenous people. Shamanism, the core of the animistic traditions, bonds the self with the earth and cosmos and recognizes that health is dependent on maintaining a balanced relationship with the intrinsically sacred dimensions of the

environment. Although ecopsychology “may not involve incorporation of all the specific techniques of shamanism,” as Leslie Gray imparts, it necessarily includes “the worldview of shamanism—that health is defined as a balanced relationship with your habitat, your ecosystem. This kind of relating empowers you as well as the ecosystem . . .”⁴⁵ Because illness is, according to the millennia-old tradition, the result of being disconnected from life-giving forces, a healer will attempt to return the sufferer to the state of balance with the sun, moon, tribe, rivers, plants, animals, and, ultimately, the spirit world, putting him or her in right relationship with nature. All kinds of rites—Wiccan, Celtic, Druid, Native-American, Chinese, and countless others—commemorate the power of the life cycle, the sun and moon, the seasons, the four winds, the ocean tides, menstrual cycles, and the heart beat. Ecopsychologists are searching for the means and the methods to cultivate that ancient reverence for and humility toward the natural world in contemporary terms. Those terms include balancing human needs with environmental impact; spending more time in nature and finding the healing powers of plants and sacred places; respecting the body and mind through exercise, proper nourishment, and various forms of meditation; and care for all co-inhabitants. All of which equal acts of worship and states of gratefulness toward the planet. As Sarah Conn explains, “The challenge of an ecologically responsible psychotherapy is . . . to participate in and contribute to the healing of the planet by finding one’s niche in the Earth’s living system and occupying it actively.”⁴⁶ Part of the attempt to embrace and activate the emerging planetary Gestalt, ecopsychology—aligned with movements such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and ecophilosophy—could help heal the West’s chronic alienation from nature.

Conclusion

Initiated by Romanticists, instituted by the proceedings and programs at Eranos and Esalen, and alive in a myriad of ecocentric movements and disciplines, a tradition of recognized writers, spurred by a Zeitgeist that is still thriving, has expounded symptoms and causes of and remedies for our dysfunctional environmental relations. The Romantic revolution, which touted freedom, imagination, Eastern philosophy, aboriginal wisdom, feminism, environmentalism, and holistic health, aimed its “back-to-nature” ideology at exposing and healing the divided self. Despite the impact of the patriarchal myths, mindset, and values of their respective cultures, authors from Goethe and Emerson to Nietzsche and James constructed the idea of a “balanced soul,” which they formulated in archetypal terms, such as the earthly and spiritual worlds of Faust,

the “Oversoul,” “healthy mindedness,” and the balance of Dionysian and Apollonian impulses. Those early notions of a balanced soul not only exposed the split self inherited through Greek philosophy, Christianity, and science, but also ignited the search for an ecocentric psyche.

The depth and Third Force psychology instituted at Eranos and Esalen, respectively, advanced the dynamics of balance in terms of Asian and aboriginal archetypal projections of the *coincidentia oppositorum*—the underlying bipolarity that guides nature and, when allowed, centres human thought and behaviour. The connected self, propounded in many theories and practices espoused at Eranos and Esalen, marks the ego’s surrender of some of its control to the collective unconscious, a process designed to revitalize the masculine with the feminine, and to reconstitute the personal with the transpersonal. Suggesting that the transpersonal could inspire a Fourth Force psychology, ecopsychologists advocate a collective unconscious that includes the ecological repository of the entire planet, or Gaia. Also seeking ways to reunite mind and body, spirit and matter, and self and nature, ecopsychologists tender the ecocentric psyche as a new paradigm of sanity, one in which “in here” and “out there,” the human and the more-than-human, and the collective and the ecological unconscious are recognized as inseparable parts of a whole. By focusing the psychological principles of balance, this tradition—from Romanticism to ecotherapy—helped articulate and transport the ecocentric Zeitgeist by counteracting the dualism that has characterized Western culture for over two millennia.

What will be made of the countercultural search for balance and the ecocentric Zeitgeist behind it? According to Charlene Spretnak, that Zeitgeist is being indoctrinated in terms of “ecological postmodernism.” While acknowledging the import of the postmodern attempt to relativize polarities and challenge structuralism’s rigidity, she indicts postmodernism’s denial of polarities and its clinging to relativism—bordering-on-solipsism, because it has resulted in an alienated, autonomous self and a groundlessly pluralistic worldview. Nevertheless, she sees postmodernism’s dispelling of “false dualisms” as creating the potential for an ecologically grounded transformation that could rebalance our sense of male and female, culture and nature, and self and cosmos. In Spretnak’s words:

One meaning of “the postmodern age,” then, is the transition currently under way in various quarters to create a passage beyond the failed assumptions of modernity and a radical reorientation that preserves the positive advances of the liberal tradition and technological capabilities but is rooted in ecological sanity and meaningful human participation in the unfolding story of the Earth community and

the universe. That process entails the creation of what I call “ecological postmodernism.”⁴⁷

In equally comprehensive terms, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry proclaim that the current “spirit of the times” could invoke an Ecozoic era—a period in human evolution that directs individual and social ventures toward a healthy, sustainable global community. They envisage this era as

the next phase of the larger story of the universe that is coming to expression not only in our institutions but in our language. Every change in the governing paradigm of human affairs requires an extensive change not only in our sense of reality and value but also in the language whereby we give expression to these concerns.⁴⁸

Berry describes the nature of these changes:

In decisive and necessary ways, we are re-inventing the human. Not only are narratives of science, religion, and psychology retelling the human story as the earth story, but practices in law, health care, and politics are also beginning to enact the experience of our geocentric community as universally sacred.⁴⁹

In concert with the emerging “universe story,” we humans are revising our role as planetary participants. The visions of Romantic and Transcendental authors as well as the discourses at Eranos and Esalen have helped articulate the ramifications of the new story, one that involves a re-identification of nature with mind, the self, and the sacred.

Could it be that the new story and our emerging role in it are as much a part of cosmic ecology as cultural evolution and more synchronistic than idiosyncratic or accidental? Perhaps the “unconscious” processes that bond the ecocentric *Zeitgeist* with its various components emanate from sources that reach beyond human origin. Perhaps the search for the balanced soul arises from an ecological unconscious that is vital to our survival. What cannot be denied is that ecocentrism has not only become part of mainstream culture, but it has also helped disseminate a clear and sound message: individual and planetary health may well depend on our ability to mend the split self propagated by Greek and Abrahamic traditions and to overcome scientism’s objectification of nature that stems from the contrived belief that we are apparitions in the natural world. By redefining sanity with Earth in mind, ecocentric thinkers hope to expand the study of the human psyche beyond the health of person, family, and society to include the environment—a task that has become urgent: from starvation to obesity, drug addictions to death penalties, and dead rivers to nuclear weapons, the signs of dependence on an unsustainable way of life define much of the world today. The task is not an easy one. Concepts such as “archetypes,” “biophilia,” “cultural transformation,” “the ecological unconscious,” “Gaia,” and “Zeitgeist” are amorphous and require careful

deliberation, but their relevance centres on the restoration of a human identity atoned with nature.

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Endnotes

¹ I would like to thank Bruce Morito, John Ollerenshaw, and Ben Smith for their helpful comments.

² Goethe 1977.

³ See Green 1986.

⁴ Despite his countercultural visions, Emerson not only supported nationalism, faith in industrial progress, and the patriarchy of his time, but also chastised American Indians for wanting to be “segregationists.”

⁵ Emerson 1965, 86–87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 215–216.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁰ James 1973, 86–90. Convinced that “healthy-mindedness” necessitated “a reconciliation” of nature’s polarities, but admittedly unable to relinquish his hard-minded, scientific bent, James confessed that he did not fully understand the paradoxical union: “It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity . . . This is a dark saying, I know, when thus expressed in terms of common logic, but I cannot wholly escape from its authority. I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly” (1973, 306).

¹¹ Nietzsche 1988, 25.

¹² Infuriated with bourgeois “herd mentality,” Nietzsche rebuked Apollonian virtues as the core of “slave morality” created by and for the meek and “womanish,” while his Dionysian Uebermensch, the ideal of “master morality,” embodies the patriarchal “will to power.”

¹³ Freud 1961, 15.

¹⁴ This is not an ecological indictment of Modernity’s key thinkers: Darwin’s work is filled with compassion for the environment, Marx’s notion of alienation is not simply social, but does involve human estrangement from the natural world, and Freud’s “science” of the unconscious and narratives on sexual repression unveiled a new means of understanding human nature.

¹⁵ Campbell 1960, xv. According to Tilo Schabert, the founder and director of Associazione Amici de Eranos, “the Eranos Tagungen is the offspring of a large ‘Eranos movement’ which emerged at several places in Europe during the last decades of the 19th century” (2004, 13).

¹⁶ Jung 1968, 143.

¹⁷ Jung 1977, 229–230.

¹⁸ Neumann 1973, 393.

¹⁹ Campbell 1981, 62.

²⁰ Eliade 1971, 162.

²¹ Campbell 1976, 21.

²² Jung 1968, 133.

²³ Suzuki 1954, 293–313.

²⁴ Eliade 1960, xxi.

²⁵ Personal communication 2003.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Murphy 1993, 30.

²⁸ Leonard 1972, 135.

²⁹ Watts 1970, 9.

³⁰ See Jung 1978.

³¹ Gregory Bateson's "mind-in-nature" theory, Stanislov Grof's "holotropic mind," and Rupert Sheldrake's "morphogenic fields" are recurring themes at Esalen conferences and seminars.

³² Watts 1970, 143.

³³ Campbell 1988, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁵ Keen 1992, 126-127.

³⁶ Riane Eisler purports that the vision shared at Esalen's 1985 "New Paradigm Symposium" was "specifically described as 'postpatriarchal,' and the new epistemology was seen as representing a 'shift from domination and control of nature to cooperation and nonviolence'" (1988, 169). Jean Sinoda Bolen and Jananne Lovett-Keen's "Wisdom: Celebrating Sacred Dimensions of the Feminine" and Margot Adler's "Ritual, Ecstasy, and Women's Spirituality" typify the ecofeminist based themes at Esalen.

³⁷ See Ralph Metzner 1991, 47.

³⁸ Environmental psychology began as a coalesced effort of architects and psychologists to create living and working environments that would benefit health and productivity, and has been expanded to include not only social settings and built environments, but natural environments as well. Conservation psychology focuses on understanding ways in which human behaviour affects the health of natural systems, and addresses issues related to education and environmental policy, population and consumption patterns, pollution production and control, and other areas that call for collaborative research and outreach.

³⁹ Maslow 1968, iii-iv.

⁴⁰ Personal communication 2004.

⁴¹ Roszak 2001, 289.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 305.

⁴³ Metzner 1995, 59. Metzner credits Thomas Berry (1988) for the autistic metaphor.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁵ Gray 1995, 181.

⁴⁶ Conn 1995, 171. Many ecopsychologists are women, which, I believe, is one of the most promising signs for the evolution of ecocentric psychology.

⁴⁷ Spretnak 1993, 4.

⁴⁸ Berry and Swimme 1994, 4.

⁴⁹ Personal communication 1995.